

And the Rest Is History



Curtis student Gary Graffman and teacher Isabelle Vengerova, 1938



Gary and Naomi Graffman during the Curtis Chamber Orchestra tour of Japan, 2004

Mr. Graffman at commencement, 2005

~ PHOTOS: HENLE FROM BLACK STAR,
DANIEL MCDUGALL, DAVID SWANSON



Gary and Naomi Graffman offer a fond look back at 20 years — and then some — of Curtis

BY LAURA C. KELLEY



THE BROWNIES WERE AN ACCIDENT.

For 20 years of Wednesday afternoons, Curtis students, faculty, and staff have nibbled the bite-sized, moist treats with tea served from silver teapots and an antique brass samovar. Naomi Graffman didn't intend to establish a precedent when she baked them for the first Tea she presided over as the director's wife.

"I knew that people had goodies with their tea on Wednesdays," she said, "and I had a recipe for brownies and blondies that made lots. So I thought, 'Well, why not try this?' It was supposed to be just once."

When Mrs. Graffman occasionally misses a Tea — usually while traveling with Gary Graffman for one of his concert performances — there are no brownies. Store-bought cookies just aren't the same. Why not bake some for the students before she leaves town? "The reason is very simple. Because I want them to connect the sweet things with *me*. You know, kind of a Pavlovian response," she said, leaving laughter to complete the metaphor.

The homemade treats are now part of Curtis tradition, as integral and unassuming as so many enhancements made during Mr. Graffman's tenure as director. And the pleasant, often humorous conversation that accompanies the brownies is typical of the approachable, friendly nature of Mr. and Mrs. Graffman, who often join the students on bus rides to concerts outside Philadelphia.

In addition to mingling at Tea, Mr. Graffman's Wednesday afternoon schedule usually includes an open-door session. During that hour, any student may drop in to discuss any topic with him. It's one of his ways to increase communication between the students and the rest of the school. Similarly, there's Student Council, which has become a voice for concerns and opinions on matters such as practice room space, career issues, housing, social activities, and personal problems.

Early in Mr. Graffman's tenure, he took Student Council to dinner in Chinatown

(one of his favorite Philadelphia haunts). It was near the end of the first semester, and a trombone student told him that he hadn't played anything in orchestra yet. From then on, when Wolfgang Sawallisch or others have asked him what repertoire to work on with the students, Mr. Graffman has had a purposeful response: "It's so generous that you're volunteering to conduct, so you choose. The only thing I ask is that it involve as many students as possible." Which means, include trombone.

ARTISTIC AND FINANCIAL MATTERS

Distinguished musicians such as Wolfgang Sawallisch, Christoph Eschenbach, Thomas Hampson, Emanuel Ax, Yo-Yo Ma, Simon Rattle, Tan Dun, and the Muir String Quartet work with Curtis students in master classes, orchestra readings, or orchestra performances, opportunities that have been formalized during Mr. Graffman's tenure. They augment students' lessons with their major teacher — or *teachers*, since numerous students now are assigned two faculty members, while others may play for a different teacher when their own is unavailable one week. "That doesn't really happen very much in other schools," Mr. Graffman said, "although sometimes they have assistants. We don't have assistants."

The performance faculty carries the artistic heft that draws record numbers of applicants from around the world. The school year is now 30 weeks, not 28, and students younger than 16 take two lessons per week. There are currently 91 faculty members covering performance, musical studies, liberal arts, and career studies. Sixty-nine have been appointed during Mr. Graffman's directorship; 15 of those are alumni whose diplomas he has signed.

Similarly, 23 current members of the Philadelphia Orchestra — nearly one-quarter of the roster — graduated from Curtis in the past 20 years. As part of his concert career, Mr. Graffman has, of course, performed with

numerous alumni. He said, "It's a nice feeling to perform with a conductor whose diploma you signed, as I just did with Miguel [Harth-Bedoya] and as I've done with Alan Gilbert and with Ignat [Solzhenitsyn], who was my piano student besides."



Naomi Graffman and student Shana Douglas at Tea, 2005 ~ PHOTO: DAVID DEBALCO

"Mark Russell Smith was the first," Mrs. Graffman added. "It made me feel awfully old."

Mr. Graffman has also played the Korngold suite for piano (left hand) and strings with several sets of students and alumni.

In his early concert days, shortly after graduating from Curtis at age 17 and long before an injury reduced his piano repertoire to that available for left hand alone, he was one of the numerous alumni who benefited from Mrs. Bok's largesse. He and Mrs. Graffman recounted the story last fall:

"You know Mrs. Bok paid for one of Gary's early recitals in Town Hall," Mrs. Graffman said.

Mr. Graffman said, "In Town Hall in New York, where most musicians gave recitals in those days."

"What was it, you made a little money?" she asked him.

"Yeah. You know, you expect to lose a lot of money. Since I grew up in New York and we had many friends there, I don't know, we

unexpectedly came out a bit ahead. So I sent her the \$400 she had paid,” he said. “And [piano teacher Isabelle] Vengerova said that Mrs. Bok was shocked: It was the first time anyone sent *money back!*” Of course she had made it clear that she wasn’t expecting any reimbursement.

Financial habits have influenced one of the challenges Mr. Graffman has faced as director: increasing the school’s endowment, which Mrs. Bok began with \$500,000 in 1924 and increased to \$12.5 million in 1927 as the all-scholarship policy was conceived. When Mr. Graffman was appointed artistic director in 1986, the endowment was valued at \$45.5 million. “The endowment paid 95 percent of our needs,” he said. “Now the endowment is over \$140 million and it only pays 75 percent of our needs.”

Why the drastic change? A portion of it is supplemental financial assistance for the students. Although they each receive merit-based full-tuition scholarships, they must pay their own living expenses and fees. In 1986, just over \$48,000 had been offered in supplemental financial assistance. In 2005, the figure was more than \$1 million.

In 1986, a sole person — Judi Gattone — ran Curtis’s admissions, financial aid, and international student programs. Now, there are four people fulfilling those needs as the number of applications has risen dramatically, financial aid requests and rules have increased, and laws regarding international students have become more complex.

Similarly, fund-raising and public relations efforts used to be small-scale, as Curtis was in the early stages of needing to raise money and it was less open to the public. In the early 1980’s, when he was teaching piano at Curtis every other week, Mr. Graffman often attended student recitals. The audience was small — sometimes embarrassingly so, he recalled, with only 20-some people, many of them colleagues of the performers. As public awareness of the concerts grew, the audience

increased, eventually drawing a loyal core and attracting groups from area senior centers and Elderhostel excursions.

“But most of the time it’s filled with people we know, who are regulars. And they are extremely regular. Wesley [Emmons] is the prime example,” Mrs. Graffman said, mentioning a sustaining member of the Friends of Curtis board, jewelry designer, and neighborhood resident who seldom misses a performance. “There are many who come to almost everything, and then sort of unofficially adopt certain of the students.”

“And then, eventually, some students have their own audiences,” Mr. Graffman said. “Automatically certain students will draw 50 more people.”

The content of the recitals also changed. Full graduation recitals became mandatory for piano, violin, viola, violoncello, and timpani/percussion students. Chamber music is more frequently performed, as it has been emphasized with coachings by various faculty, coordinated by Steven Tenenbom. Students often play full concertos with piano accompaniment on the recital series. Previously, they could perform only a single movement with a chamber orchestra once during their studies.

LEARNING A NEW PART

How does someone with no previous administrative experience accomplish these and other enhancements while continuing a performance career? After all, it was an unlikely role for Mr. Graffman.

“I have to tell you something about Gary’s teaching here before he became director,” Mrs. Graffman said. “Being a pianist, he hardly ever wore a shirt and tie — mostly turtlenecks — and so the first day he came to Curtis he was getting dressed and I saw him putting on a tie. I said, ‘What on earth are you doing?’ And he said, ‘Oh, I couldn’t go to Curtis without putting on a tie!’” This summer, when the Graffmans lived primarily



Mr. Graffman addresses students on Meeting Day, 2001.

~ PHOTO: DAVID MORRIS

in Philadelphia during renovations to their New York apartment, he finally started to go to school in a sport shirt, she observed.

Sitting in his office during an interview last fall, Mr. Graffman recalled another reaction to his new role, 20 years ago: “The first day I was here, sitting at this desk — in this chair at this desk — and the door was open. And Arnold Steinhardt passed by and sort of nodded to me, kept on walking. And I could hear him stop, walk backwards; he looked at me, burst out laughing, and kept walking.”

Mr. Graffman himself laughed telling the story, then quickly named his former executive assistant, Vera Bruestle, and Dean Robert Fitzpatrick as the two people who dispelled the uncertainties of his first days. “Because of Vera and Bob Fitzpatrick things worked quite soon. Otherwise, I would’ve been really floundering for at least a year. Their support really was immeasurable.”

Miss Bruestle helped to convince him to accept the position in the first place, countering his doubt by insisting that she would help him. “That was a very important thing to say,” Mrs. Graffman said. And Miss Bruestle did assist him, serving until her retirement in 2002.

“Vera would anticipate practically anything that would be happening each day,” Mr. Graffman said. “She had a great sense of what’s really important, what’s somewhat important, what’s a waste of time, and everything in between.”

For the past three years, Carol Hauptfuhrer has coordinated his schedule and kept matters running smoothly even when he was traveling or home in New York City.

Although Mr. Graffman had been on the piano faculty since 1980, he knew little about the overall operation of Curtis or about Philadelphia itself. For these matters, he turned to Mr. Fitzpatrick, a lifelong Philadelphian and musician (see page 16 for a profile). “I remember being always very impressed with him,” Mr. Graffman said.



(From top left) André Previn, Mr. Graffman, and Ned Rorem with the piano part to Mr. Rorem’s Piano Concerto for Left Hand and Orchestra, 1993

Mr. Graffman, Philadelphia Orchestra Music Director Wolfgang Sawallisch, and Curtis Chairman Dr. Milton L. Rock at commencement, 1994

Mr. Graffman with the Philadelphia Orchestra’s Curtis alumni and faculty members, 2003

Vera Bruestle, 1992

Students Lisa Lee, Sophie Shao, and Judy Yen-Jiun Lin with Mr. Graffman before a chamber music performance at New York’s Taipei Theatre, 1994

~ PHOTOS: STEVE J. SHERMAN, DAVID SWANSON, JEAN BRUBAKER, CURTIS ARCHIVES, DAVID SWANSON

“When [director John] de Lancie would have a serious talk with me about a project or the piano department, Bob would always be sitting in and offering his thoughts.”

“He took us under his wing and showed us everything,” Mrs. Graffman said. “Whenever you would ask him a question — for example, auditoriums. He knew every single auditorium in Philadelphia...”

“Every space,” said Mr. Graffman.

“Its capacity, what’s good about it, what was bad about it,” Mrs. Graffman continued. “Everything that had to do with Philadelphia, including the restaurants, he was completely conversant with. So the education we received from him was absolutely unbelievable.”

While Mr. Graffman was learning about the administrative side of Curtis, Mrs. Graffman dove into the library. “I felt that if I was really going to be spending time here, I wanted to do something that provided an opportunity to get to know some of the kids. I didn’t know at that time that they didn’t necessarily hang out in the library. I thought everyone went to the library,” she said.

Head Librarian Elizabeth Walker suggested that she assist with competition and summer festival announcements. Since Mrs. Graffman had worked in concert management and was familiar with the material, she was pleased to begin coordinating the many announcements and applications. The backlog took her a year to organize. She maintains master binders with competition and summer festival brochures and makes extra copies available in a kiosk, and there’s a card catalog to track the various programs.

As a rule, Curtis encourages a noncompetitive environment, and Mrs. Graffman sees her role as organizing information rather than endorsing competition. “I have taken the liberty on occasion to write ‘WARNING’ over certain ones that are absolute scams, because there are a number of those. But I try not to editorialize, because it’s up to the kids,”



Mrs. Graffman with alumni Jason (left) and Zachary DePue at commencement, 2002 ~ PHOTO: DON TRACY

she said. “Some of the competitions require quite a lot of money to be invested, and there are some that are just out to make as much money as they can.”

Mrs. Graffman is aware that her paper cataloging efforts are being superseded by technology, as competitions provide materials electronically and library circulation manager Darryl Hartshorne compiles a master list of e-mail and website addresses for competitions. “So it’s just as well I’m retiring now,” she said, “as all this paperwork is fast becoming obsolete.”

COMMENCEMENT

Soon she will trade stacks of brochures and Curtis publication proofs for canvases and brushes, as she spends more time painting. Mr. Graffman will continue to teach piano at Curtis and to perform concerts and to give master classes around the world after he “graduates,” as he calls the end of his directorship. “I can make more trips to crazy places,” he said. “During the time I was here, I went to Tibet, Burma, Laos, Vietnam, but I’d have to figure out when to go, when is a good time, when is not a good time. Soon I can be more flexible, stay longer. Read more books.” And don’t forget practicing. ☺

CELEBRATING THE GRAFFMANS

Between now and June 1, 2006 — when Roberto Díaz becomes Curtis’s ninth director — the Graffmans’ significant contributions to the Institute’s students, alumni, faculty, staff, and boards, as well as to classical music, will be celebrated.

One such occasion will be the Graffman 20 Gala in conjunction with the April 23 Curtis Symphony Orchestra concert, conducted by Christoph Eschenbach, music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and featuring Mr. Graffman as soloist in the Ravel left-hand concerto. The program will also include Stravinsky’s *Firebird Suite* (1919) and Bartók’s *Concerto for Orchestra*. The evening will begin with cocktails and dinner at the Park Hyatt Philadelphia at the Bellevue, sponsored by Hawthorn/member of The PNC Financial Services Group.

To further support the students, the Graffmans requested the creation of a special endowment fund. The Gary and Naomi Graffman Scholarship Fund will provide need-based student financial assistance, and contributions were initiated by former trustee chairmen A. Margaret Bok, Dr. Milton L. Rock, and Shaun F. O’Malley, who have invited others to join them in this endeavor. Alan and Nancy Hirsig took them up on the offer, pledging \$1 million to the fund.

For more information, contact the Curtis Development Office at 215-893-5279. ☺

Mr. Graffman and Stanislaw Skrowaczewski with the Curtis Symphony Orchestra in the premiere of Skrowaczewski's *Concerto Nicolò*, 2003

~ PHOTO: JEAN BRUBAKER



Enhancements During the Graffman Directorship (1986 – 2006)

Since pianist Gary Graffman was appointed director of The Curtis Institute of Music in 1986, numerous musical, academic, curricular, administrative, and physical-plant enhancements have been made at the Philadelphia conservatory. Underlying these accomplishments is the steadfast determination to maintain both Curtis's mission — as articulated by founder Mary Louise Curtis Bok in 1924: “to train exceptionally gifted young musicians for careers as performing artists on the highest professional level” — and its policy of providing merit-based full-tuition scholarships to all students, ensuring that talent is the sole consideration for admission.



AFTER CONFIRMING HIS OPPOSITION to change for the sake of change or trends at Curtis, Mr. Graffman said: “I welcome (and have even been known to instigate) change when I believe it is appropriate for us. Here are some of the changes we have made at Curtis since I joined the administration 20 years ago.”

PUBLIC PERFORMANCES

1. We formalized the schedule of presenting at least three major Curtis Symphony Orchestra concerts each school year, first at the Academy of Music and, since 2002, in Verizon Hall at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts. Formerly such concerts were fewer — usually only one per year — and sporadic. In addition, there are often regional run-out performances.
2. The public performances of our vocal studies department have also been formalized with three or four productions by the Curtis Opera Theatre each season in Philadelphia-area venues, including the Curtis Opera Studio.

3. We have formalized at least two Curtis Chamber Orchestra concerts per season, giving the students the opportunity to gain more experience in performing different repertoire.
4. We increased the number of performances on the Student Recital Series to more than 100 per season and actively solicited outside audiences. The concerts, held in the 240-seat Field Concert Hall, are extremely well attended, often filled to capacity.

All students are encouraged to appear at least once a semester on the series, performing either solo or chamber music.

They now often play full concertos with piano accompaniment at student recitals in order to gain performance experience in this repertoire. Many play two or more complete concertos (with piano accompaniment) each year of their enrollment.

Full recitals must be played by all graduating pianists, violinists, violists, cellists, and timpanists/percussionists; otherwise, the bachelor's degree or diploma is not granted. Other graduating students have the option to give a recital.

OTHER MUSICAL MATTERS

5. Many students — especially of stringed instruments and piano — have more than one major teacher. All students have opportunities to play for teachers who are not their major teacher.
6. We have placed much more emphasis than formerly on the study of chamber music and now have a faculty member who serves as coordinator.
7. We have formalized our master classes, with approximately 50 visiting artists each season. Many guest conductors of the Philadelphia Orchestra come to work with our students. Wolfgang Sawallisch came each year during his tenure with the orchestra, and we now have a close relationship with Christoph Eschenbach, who has conducted one Curtis Symphony Orchestra concert each season.
8. We now offer classes in harpsichord and early music.
9. We encourage all violinists to study viola, as well.



Student Inna Nassidze and Mr. Graffman in a master class with Yo-Yo Ma, 1994

University of Pennsylvania President Sheldon Hackney and Mr. Graffman with the schools' reciprocal agreement, 1988

Students Mimi Stillman and Pavel Ilyashov with Mr. Graffman at Tea, 1999

~ PHOTOS: DON TRACY, CURTIS ARCHIVES, DAVID DEBALCO

10. We have added a weekly piano seminar for all pianists so that they can be heard and critiqued by members of the piano faculty (other than their teachers) and by their peers.

11. We have increased the teaching season from 28 weeks to 30 weeks.

12. Younger students receive two private lessons each week instead of one.

13. We have added staff pianists to work as accompanists for students.

14. We have upgraded our instrument collection.

15. We have increased audition repertoire requirements and admissions selectivity, from accepting approximately 15 percent of applicants in 1986 to approximately 5 percent in 2005, while maintaining Curtis's small enrollment of, on average, 160 students.

16. In 1991, we began our Adopt-a-School outreach program, through which Curtis students teach one-on-one instrumental lessons to selected Philadelphia public-school students; it is now professionally managed. Under the auspices of the Albert M. Greenfield Concerts, our students gain experience in performing interactive programs at schools, senior centers, hospitals, and community venues throughout the Delaware Valley. They also perform on the annual PECO Family Concert Series, held

at Curtis. Special outreach training is provided to the students, who are compensated for their performances.

17. Professional-quality audio and video recordings of recitals and special recording sessions for auditions and competitions are available to students. Some recitals are later broadcast by National Public Radio stations WHYY-FM and WITF-FM.

ACADEMIC AND EXTRA-MUSICAL CURRICULUM

18. We received full accreditation from the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, which means that our bachelor's degree is recognized by all graduate schools in the United States. We also received full accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Music.

19. We enriched our liberal arts curricular offerings with courses in art history, acoustics, computer applications, English literature, history, modern European languages, psychology, aesthetics, and philosophy.

20. We instituted a reciprocal agreement with the University of Pennsylvania to allow students who have completed our liberal arts requirements to enroll, at no cost, at the university for courses not available at Curtis and, in return, for the Curtis orchestra to perform works by Penn's student composers.

21. We instituted a compulsory career seminar, "The 21st-Century Musician," for students to take in their penultimate year. It is the cornerstone of the new career studies department.

22. We entered the data from the library's card catalog to an online system describing more than 60,000 volumes of music scores and books and more than 18,000 recordings within the John de Lancie Library in the Milton L. Rock Resource Center. The Rock Online Catalog is accessible from any computer on the Curtis network. Also, the library began to circulate CD's and DVD's overnight.

STUDENT LIFE

23. I have an "open door" policy for one hour a week, during which anyone — student, faculty, or staff member — can come to talk to me about any subject. (Of course, they are also free to make appointments for other times.)

24. We have instituted an active Student Council, providing leadership opportunities, offering activities for all students, and giving a student voice to administration, volunteer boards, and faculty.

(Below, from left) Board leaders Miles B. Davis (Alumni Council), Mrs. Samuel R. Rossman (Friends of Curtis), Richard A. Doran (Board of Trustees), and Efrem Zimbalist III (Board of Overseers), 2003

Alumnus George Rochberg, Mr. Graffman, Chairman A. Margaret Bok, and alumni and faculty Jascha Brodsky, Orlando Cole, and Vladimir Sokoloff at commencement, 1986

~ PHOTOS: JEAN BRUBAKER, CURTIS ARCHIVES



25. Internet access and e-mail addresses are available for all students, and computers have been added in the student lounge, the library, and the computer studio for their use. The computer studio has been equipped with Macintosh systems and Finale music-notation software, used for classes and assignments.

26. We have more organized arrangements for physical and mental health care.

27. With the Friends of Curtis, we began a program to pair students with local hosts, who attend their concerts, invite them to dinner, and provide a Philadelphia connection.

28. We have initiated an exit survey for graduating students. It is especially useful to hear from them since they know Curtis as it is. Also, because they are graduating, they are more likely to identify themselves on the surveys, which adds to the effectiveness.

PHYSICAL PLANT

29. We purchased the building at 1718 Locust Street in 1987 for administrative offices, studios, and liberal arts classrooms; created a black-box theater; renovated Field Concert Hall; and installed an elevator lift for handicapped access to the Hall from the sidewalk.

ALUMNI ACTIVITIES

30. We have formed a highly active and professionally managed Alumni Council to strengthen ties among alumni worldwide and between alumni and Curtis.

31. Working with the Alumni Society of Greater Philadelphia, we have formalized the Alumni Recital Series of four performances annually, for which performers donate their services for the benefit of the students.

32. We facilitate numerous alumni events throughout the world where Curtis alumni are performing, as well as at alumni or student concerts at Curtis.

33. From 1997 to 2003, we hosted an annual alumni reunion weekend in conjunction with commencement, when returning alumni interacted with each other, current students, faculty, staff, and donors at various events. Reunions are now held every five years, in conjunction with the Institute's anniversary celebrations. The most recent was in May 2005 for the 80th anniversary.

ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

34. We successfully completed two capital campaigns, raising \$5.4 million from 1990 to 1993 and more than \$36 million for the *Sound for the Century* Campaign from 2000 to 2004.

35. Annual giving increased from \$292,790 in 1986 to \$1,861,000 in 2005. Giving to the 2005 Alumni Annual Fund reached 28 percent. The Leopold Stokowski Society was founded for top-level donors.

36. Supplemental financial assistance increased from \$48,067 in 1986 to \$1,042,000 in 2005.

37. The endowment grew from \$45.5 million in 1986 to approximately \$140 million in 2005.

38. We launched our first two websites (that's how quickly the online world evolves!) at www.curtis.edu. The site now provides an array of information for potential students worldwide, local audiences, and current students and faculty, plus online giving increases each year, and the number of views has grown to more than 120,000 per month.

39. Members of the Board of Trustees participate in Curtis activities to a greater degree; there are many more committees than before.

40. In 1997, we founded a national Board of Overseers, comprising leaders in the music profession, to enhance Curtis's mission and assist its development. ☺